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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003254

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SUBJECT: HONOR KILLINGS AND SUICIDE BURNINGS REPORTEDLY ON
RISE IN KURDISTAN

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL J. ADLER, FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary. Kurdistan civil society and political leaders warned PolOffs in separate conversations late August that honor killings and suicide burnings were on the rise. Representatives of women's shelters in Kurdistan said that women were seeking out their help more frequently and that they feared the quality of their services would falter in the face of such a trend. Venus Shamal from Kurdistan Human Rights Watch explained that in addition to honor killings, honor burnings (in which women douse themselves with kerosene and light themselves on fire) are becoming more common. To a lesser extent, she said, the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is also reviving. End Summary.

12. (C) In a conversation August 27, Kurdistan Human Rights Watch representative Venus Shamal told PolOffs that the incidence of honor killings had been steadily increasing over the past two years. She said that honor burnings are also becoming more common. To a much lesser extent, Shamal indicated, her organization was seeing the reappearance of FGM, particularly when talking with women in rural areas and internally displaced people (IDP) camps. She noted that this practice had been uncommon since her grandmother's time. KRG Minister of Human Rights, Yousif Mohammed Aziz, confirmed to PolOff August 30 that his Ministry had noted a resurgence in honor killings and suicides. Though no formal statistics have been collected, Minister Yousif estimated that over a hundred such cases of honor killings and suicides occur each month as evidenced through reports to his ministry as well as the media. He said honor burnings were especially troubling and that the women's section of the ministry was attempting to get a better sense of the occurrence of the phenomenon.

13. (C) In an August 29 conversation with Poloffs, Asuda organization representative Khanim Rahim linked the revival of these practices to the advent of phone cameras and videos which made it easier for youth to be exposed in behavior that their families would find inappropriate. Noted Kurdish novelist and academic Ferhad Pirbal reinforced this supposition in a later conversation with PolOffs August 29. He explained that his college students were often video-recording their private interactions, and these recordings were being distributed in a public forum by unscrupulous friends, endangering the young woman or man involved.

14. (C) When asked whether this sense of increase in honor killings and suicides was simply a function of more open reporting, Asuda,s Khanim Rhanim responded in the negative. She indicated that her organization, which provides services and shelter to women in need, was seeing more cases where honor killings were a real threat. UNAMI's senior human rights officer Elio Tamburi indicated to PolOff his belief that the number of these killings and suicides has indeed

risen. According to Tamburi (strictly protect), UNAMI,s Erbil office has received information from Erbil's Medicolegal Institute (a.k.a., central morgue) pointing to an increase in killings or suicides among women in Kurdistan. Over 50 percent were due to death by fire.

15. (C) The resurgence of honor killings has affected the landscape of services for women. Khanim Rhanim lamented that, as the number of cases grow per year, the services that her shelter provides will deteriorate in quality. "We will not turn anyone away, but we can not guarantee that we will be able to give them the same quality support." Among the six known women's shelter across Kurdistan, Asuda's shelter is one of the largest, serving over 100 women per year.

16. (C) Awat Abdullah, representative of the Pana Center and women's shelter in Kirkuk, noted August 26 that the solutions that her organization can provide for women are often very limited. In some cases, she says, her social workers have been able to negotiate with families of potential honor killing victims an agreement to allow the woman back into their households without any fear of reprisal. In other cases, however, the center has been unsuccessful.

Comment

17. (C) The reports of an upsurge in honor killings and FGM are particularly troubling given their location. The support system for women in Kurdistan, while not perfect, is the most extensive compared with other parts of Iraq. Post itself has referred many cases of women in need from around the country to shelters in Kurdistan. The openness with which Kurdish government and civil society leaders appear to have toward

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discussing the problem is a positive indication. Post will continue to encourage the KRG to identify ways to address the situation. KRG Human Rights Minister Yousif Aziz indicated to Poloff in their August 30 conversation that his ministry was drafting legislation to more strictly punish those involved in honor killings (septel). This, along with awareness campaigns and better shelter services for women in need, could go a long way toward stemming the problem. Contacts have also floated the idea of organizing mediation teams that would help resolve issues between the potential victims and their families.
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